Castlemaine Naturalist

February 2013

Vol. 38.1 #406

Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Jacky Winter Photo – Noel Young

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2012

Speakers and Subject Matter:

a great variety of subjects, and speakers, such as:-

Wetlands – Damien Cook covered the ecology of the Victorian Volcanic Plains, whereas local, Geoff Park concentrated on those of the Moolort Plain. We used his information for a field trip next day.

Long Term Monitoring – Ern Perkins spoke on the work he and others have been doing to monitor environmental effects from, for example, climate and controlled burns, and led a field trip to Muckleford on the subject.

Plants - Cassia Read spoke on Bryophytes, and followed it up next day leading a morning field trip on the same subject to Clinkers Hill.

Birds - Photography with Bob Cook, Sri Lanka with Stuart Dashper.
Another "further away" night was with Carol Hall, who showed images and spoke of her trip to Spitsbergen and Greenland.

Projects, etc:

With Connecting Country, made a Grass CD and CFNC supported this, contributing towards the cost. The annual book prize for an Environmental Studies student, won this year by Kylie Payne, was funded, and the annual Broom Pull in the butterfly area of the gardens was carried out. We also continue with the quarterly roadside cleanup, though no planting has been done for several years, by us, anyway.

It has been harder each year to carry out the Swift Parrot surveys and the annual Bird Count due to lack of numbers of members able to take part.

Field Trips:

These have been varied, though this year they have been mainly local. We are trying to record the health of as many of the local small Bushland Nature Reserves as is feasible. Further afield was a trip to Wombat Dam near Daylesford (a cool place for a February field trip – and it rained!), and a Spring one to Blackwood.

I find it very disappointing that a Field Naturalist Club has so few members who go on field trips. I suppose I have always felt that that is what being a Field Naturalist is about.

Some members attended SEANA camps, several of us enjoyed a few days at Point Lonsdale with Joy Wetherill, and we held the Wednesday Wildflower Walks again, with quite good numbers present.

Committee:

I believe we really do need new, younger, enthusiastic committee members if the club is to survive, though. Like many other clubs, too much reliance is on the elderly members to run the club, and we're not always going to be there. Having said all that, I want to thank those who have supported me and the Club by serving on the Committee:

George Broadway who has taken on the Secretary's job for so long, and has opened the Broadway home for the Committee meetings. Thank you both, George and Phee.

Noel Young is doing an excellent, but often frustrating, job on the newsletter, contributing some brilliant photographs, as well as having to write articles himself.

Nigel Harland as Treasurer has done a sterling job keeping us up to date with our finances, despite interesting birds turning up at inconvenient times!

Chris Timewell has been doing all sorts – very thorough, he has been liaising with Connecting Country, and finding speakers, among other things, and he's also taken charge of opening up when I have been unable to.

Kit Morris has been working solidly at getting the Small Bushland Reserves

survey sheet set out in an efficient and easy to use form. We hope to make more use of this on field trips in 2013.

Richard Piesse comes up with some great suggestions for field trips, and is often the leader, which we all appreciate. He is also a great encourager and I have appreciated that very much.

I thank you all so very much for your support. Despite being the only woman on the team I have never felt the odd one out.

Rita Mills. President

CFNC speaker programme for 2013

February	Nigel Harland	Birds and animals of Brazil
March	Kerryn Herman	Birds of Fiji
April	Steve Williams	Caterpillars to Moths
May	Mat Sheehan	Weeds
June	Lynne Kelly	Spiders
July	Julian Hollis	Local geology
August	*	
September	*	
October	Ian Wacey	Waterfalls of Victoria
November	Elaine Bayes, Tim New	Eltham Copper Butterflies
December	Members' night	

***to be confirmed**

Reminder: please attend

The Annual General Meeting

February 8, 2013

And support your club

Nigel Harland will present an illustrated talk on his recent trip to Brazil

Birds using the Castlemaine Sewage Ponds

By Chris Timewell

From what I've been told, the Castlemaine Wastewater Treatment Plant used to be one of the best local birdwatching sites around, and one of the few sites near Castlemaine where wading waterbirds such as sandpipers, stilts and egrets could be seen. Presumably, the shallow nutrient rich water provided bountiful foraging opportunities. However, in recent years, the water has been mostly sent to the Castlemaine Golf Course, and the settling ponds have subsequently rarely been used.

Late in the day of the Annual Bird Count (Sunday 2 December 2012), Lisa and I looked into the treatment plant through the wire fence from Langslow Street. We saw that some of the ponds had water in them, and that there were a few ducks and Masked Lapwings about. We decided to return soon for a better look.

On Sunday morning of 13 January 2013, Lisa and I wandered through the tip buffer zone (beyond the end of Honeycomb Rd) to get a better view of the ponds from the slopes overlooking the treatment plant. And this time we had a spotting scope with us. We found that many of the ponds had dried out completely, probably as a result of the extended dry hot period through December 2012 and early January 2013. However, there were still 3-4 ponds with water in them, and the waterbirds were concentrated within and around these. These are listed in the table below.

Waterbird Species Name	Numbers Seen
Grey Teal	14
Pacific Black Duck	24
Australian Wood Duck	66
Hardhead	9
Great Cormorant	2*
Little Pied Cormorant	1*
Australian White Ibis	8
White-faced Heron	1
Red-kneed Dotterel	3
Black-fronted Dotterel	5
Masked Lapwing	3
Purple Swamphen	6
Eurasian Coot	16
Black-tailed Native Hen	7

*– seen in flight overhead only

Merrin Merrin Revisited 15/12/12

Rita Mills

The destination for the Field Trip in December was in doubt until about 5 minutes before we headed off to Merrin Merrin Swamp on a majority decision. Before that it was going to be (probably) Expedition Pass Res. (perhaps).

The day was sunny with some cloud, and there was much less water in Merrin Merrin than the time before, and much less mud, though we had to tread carefully in places, as we tried to sneak up on birds. There were lots of Welcome Swallows, plenty of ducks, a number of Inland (Whiskered) Terns, Straw-necked Ibis, White-faced Herons, Egrets - in fact a good number of interesting birds! And I've lost my list. But it really was a day for the birdos, though there were some interesting plants to keep the plant people happy(ish) including some magnificent old Red Gums, and a small Goodenia, which I think is the Swamp Goodenia *Goodenia humilis.* The photographers were kept busy.

Best of all, we had great company. I thought it was a very pleasant way to spend our last Field Trip of the year.

Additional notes - Noel Young

Birds seen on the excursion included:

En route:- Nankeen Kestrel, Wedge tailed Eagle, Blue wren, Pipit, Willy wagtail, Raven, Magpie.

Merrin Merrin:- Swamp Harrier, White-browed Woodswallow, Songlark, White-faced Heron, White-necked Heron, White Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Swan, Whiskered Tern, Swallow, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Silver Gull, Masked Lapwing, Australian Shelduck, Black-tailed Native Hen, Kookaburra, Mudlark, Kestrel, Red Wattlebird, Starling.

On the way back we stopped at a roadside spot where Rita had seen small flowering plants known as Blue Devils, (*Eryngium ovinum,* a plains grassland perennial herb) and sure enough, we found a number of them along the roadside gutter sporting their strange spiky metallic blue flowers.

SEANA autumn camp

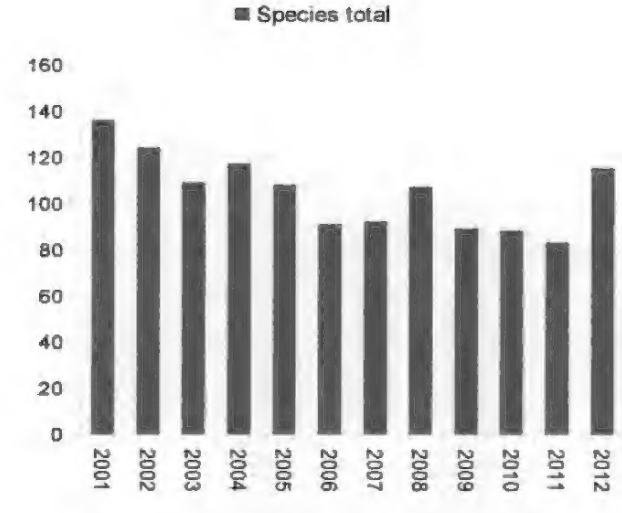
Will be hosted by the **Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc.**
Friday 15th March to Sunday 17th March

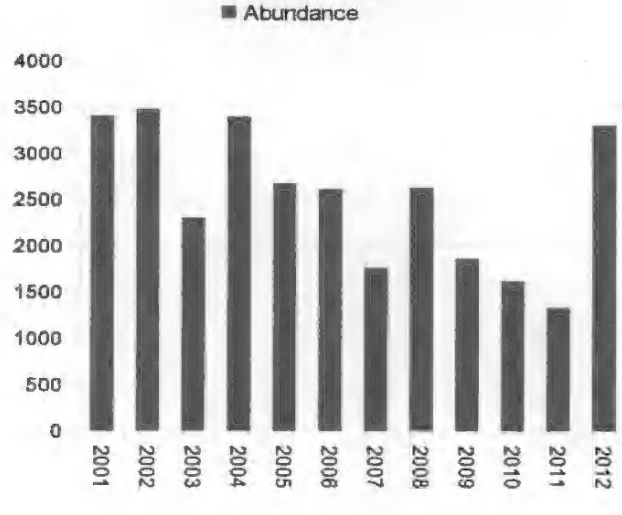
Excursions will concentrate on the southern Mornington Peninsula, in particular the Point Nepean National Park, with other activities including a full day trip to Mud Islands, rock pooling at Flinders, birding at Coolart wetlands and geology at Cape Schank

Accommodation is offered at Merricks Lodge (UCA camp)
3670 Frankston-Flinders Rd: www.uccamping.org.au

See club table or Secretary for details or contact:
Ms Doris Weigert PFNC (03) 5979 3268

Bird count update





The annual bird count held on the first weekend in December 2012 showed an unexpected spike in both species and numbers, with a grand total of 115 species and 3297 birds counted – almost back to the results of the first few years of the century.

While this is both interesting and encouraging, it is probably unwise to read too much into an individual year but look for an overall trend, as other factors can influence the results each time.

There were some interesting sightings this time, such as Southern White-face, White-fronted Chat, Buff-banded Rail and Painted Honeyeater.

Observations

- At the December meeting -
- At Expedition Pass, two Long necked Tortoises about 15 cm long and one smaller one about 10cm long. Good to see some surviving as fishing hooks take a toll on them - Denis Hurley
- Richard Piesse reported a plague of soldier beetles in his Melbourne garden, dropping out of his blossoming Linden tree in thousands. Others have reported similar plagues recently, but they are not listed as a pest as they mainly consume rotting organic matter.
- Chris Timewell spotted three or four **White throated Needletails** the previous night before a storm. These remarkable birds arrive in Australia from Asian breeding grounds for spring and summer, and spend the entire season on the wing – they surf the weather fronts catching airborne insects.
- Chris has also visited Bells Swamp on the bird count weekend and reports that there is still a fair amount of water and plenty of birds, including the Great Crested Grebe, Red-kneed Dotterel, and a possible sighting of a Cockatiel in flight
- A couple of Great Cormorants were reported to be inhabiting small bush dams in the Chewton area
- Two Barn Owls calling in the evening at Barkers Ck - Geoff Harris
- And Geraldine - a Bronzewing Pigeon had a fatal encounter with the house window recently; also that everywhere in the bush common brown butterflies can be seen, apparently feeding on the Everlastings
- A Lesser Long-eared Bat was found dead on a verandah – it has been sent to Melbourne for examination – Denis Hurley
- January –
- Nigel Harland saw a very large (est. 500) flock of Little Ravens
- a White necked Heron near home, the first for some time – Rita Mills [I have noticed an increase in their numbers generally in the last year or so – Ed]
- Geoff Park in his blog on the Newstead area remarked that the Honeyeaters have almost disappeared from the district, coinciding with the scarcity of flowers. I have noticed a similar thinning out locally, and even the 'resident' New Holland Honeyeaters in my backyard have been conspicuous by their absence since Christmas – Noel Young
- On 30th January I visited Bells Swamp – still a fair amount of water and lots of birds. I recorded over 30 species in about two hours, including large numbers of Shelduck, Grey Teal and Native Hens, plus Great Egrets, Swans, Red-kneed and Black-fronted Dotterels, White-necked Heron, Pied Stilt and a Royal Spoonbill - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
December 2012

Fri February 8: First meeting for 2013 including AGM
Speaker: NIGEL HARLAND - Wildlife of Brazil

Sat February 9 field trip: Newstead area

Fri March 8 meeting: speaker KERRYN HERMAN – Birds of Fiji

Sat March 9 field trip: to be decided

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2012
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2012 Committee

Rita Mills (President)			5472 4553
George Broadway (Secretary)	georgebroadway@bigpond.com		5472 2513
Nigel Harland (Treasurer)	5474 8246	Chris Morris	0418 996 289
Richard Piesse	0448 572 867	Chris Timewell	5472 1553
Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345		

[email newsletter material to: **noel.young@optusnet.com.au**]

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B